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SUBJECT: UN/IRAQ: UNAMI SECURITY ISSUES AND NEXT STEPS

REF: A) USUN 104B) USUN 346C) BAGHDAD 417

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor William J. Brencick, Reason
s: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Begin Summary. The SYG hosted a policy committee meeting March 7 for senior UN staff to discuss Iraq. He decided to expand UN operations in Erbil and approved the plan for mid- and long-term UNAMI accommodation in Baghdad. He decided not to expand in Basra for now and continued to insist that UNAMI has dedicated aircraft from a member state. The security review completed by U/SYG for the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) David Veness after his February trip to Baghdad was crucial to the deliberations of the committee. Prior to the SYG's meeting, Veness briefed Ambassador Wolff on the recommendations he would make to the SYG. Veness has concluded that UN operations in Iraq are sustainable, but the mission must be more focused and more disciplined, and UNAMI must move towards greater security self-sufficiency. End Summary.

Policy Committee Meeting

¶2. (C) The policy committee, which is chaired by the SYG and includes the D/SYG, DSS Department of Political Affairs (DPA), Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and UN Development Program (UNDP), met March 7 on Iraq. Secretariat staff have told us there was grumbling from some quarters, including Louise Frechette (a lame duck), that the UN should not engage significantly in Iraq, but that U/SYG Veness and Michael Williams, Director of DPA's Asia Pacific Division (APD), kept the discussion focused on operation issues and reaching decisions. This meeting followed the late December policy committee on Iraq, at which no decisions were taken. Many UN staff responsible for Iraq have been frustrated with the delays of the UN leadership in taking some of the difficult decisions on UNAMI. One DPA contact welcomed that the committee in this case "had made decisions for once!"

¶3. (C) Erbil/Basra: The SYG approved deployment of the guard unit to Erbil with a view to subsequent deployment of international substantive staff. The guard unit should be in place o/a May 1. The SYG would approve a new staff ceiling closer to that time, based on the recommendation of U/SYG Veness, but the guard unit decision was made on the assumption that the Erbil staff ceiling will be raised. The

SYG decided to maintain the operational status quo in Basra. This decision was consistent with the recommendation of U/SYG Veness, who has concerns about the area for now. Veness told us that with limited movement in and around Basra, there is no point in sending additional staff who would be restricted to the compound. The SYG's decision would be reviewed as circumstances improve.

¶4. (C) Baghdad: The SYG approved the mid- and long-term accommodation plan proposed by DPA and DSS. According to this plan, UNAMI staff would move gradually from the al-Rasheed Hotel, which the ISF will assume responsibility for, to the Bechtel Compound. UNAMI staff will move in gradually, as USAID contractors move out, and space becomes available. At the same time, UNAMI will refurbish the site of the former U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Renovations could take some eighteen months, but that site would be the UN's long-term facility and house all UNAMI staff.

¶5. (C) Aviation: Apparently, the SYG expressed to the policy committee his continued frustration with the unwillingness of member states to provide UNAMI a dedicated aircraft. He rejected U/SYG Veness' proposal that UNAMI rely on a "mixed economy" of aviation to include commercial/charter, MNF-I and other aircraft. Veness had suggested that this option would allow the UN to continue to pursue a dedicated aircraft, but also take advantage of the potential Japanese offer of some aviation support, and consider other options. (Comment: The SYG has dug his heels in on this issue, but the deployment of UN staff to Erbil will increase UNAMI's aviation requirement, and he will likely need to revisit it. End Comment.)

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U/SYG Veness

¶6. (U) In a March 6 meeting prior to the policy committee meeting, U/SYG for Department of Safety and Security (DSS) David Veness asked Ambassador Wolff to convey his thanks to MNF-I and the U.S. Embassy for the superb support and access he received during his February visit to Iraq.

¶7. (C) Veness drew a number of conclusions about UNAMI security and operations from his trip that contributed to his recommendations to the SYG and the policy committee conclusions. He presented Ambassador Wolff his conclusions, and we understand the SYG and his policy committee received more or less the same presentation. The points include the following:

-- He concluded that maintaining the UN operation in Iraq (UNAMI) is feasible, but its mission must be better defined. Specifically, the humanitarian/development mission should be crystallized. UNAMI needs more discipline and must not be inspired by enthusiasm alone. There will be need to be a greater delineation of the UN role from the coalition; given the security situation, the UN has maintained a "head down" policy since the SRSG's return in 2004, but more a more rigorous internal debate over the UN role will be needed.

-- UNAMI must continue to run as a cross-border operation, with Amman and Kuwait as critical support elements. Expansion in Iraq is possible, but should be careful and disciplined. He forecast a stable staff ceiling in Baghdad for some time, in Basra until the security situation improves, and an increase in Erbil.

-- UNAMI must acquire self-sufficiency by December 2007. Given expectations of MNF-I's future posture, UNAMI must become less reliant on the MNF, but will continue to rely on the MNF for certain strategic capabilities for the foreseeable future. UNAMI will need better threat information and intelligence and should work more closely in this regard with U.S.-UK. UNAMI must consider migration to a

host country security relationship and might look at private contractors. (Note: This last point will be a tough fight within the Secretariat. The SYG has rejected the use of private security contractors in Iraq, with a few exceptions in the past, and insisted that member states provide the UN the necessary assistance. End Note.)

-- Staff movements must be more disciplined. Frequency of R&R travel poses a risk, and UNAMI must plan travel farther in advance and work better within the MNF planning cycle. DSS must improve the 55 percent manning of posts it currently has in Iraq.

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